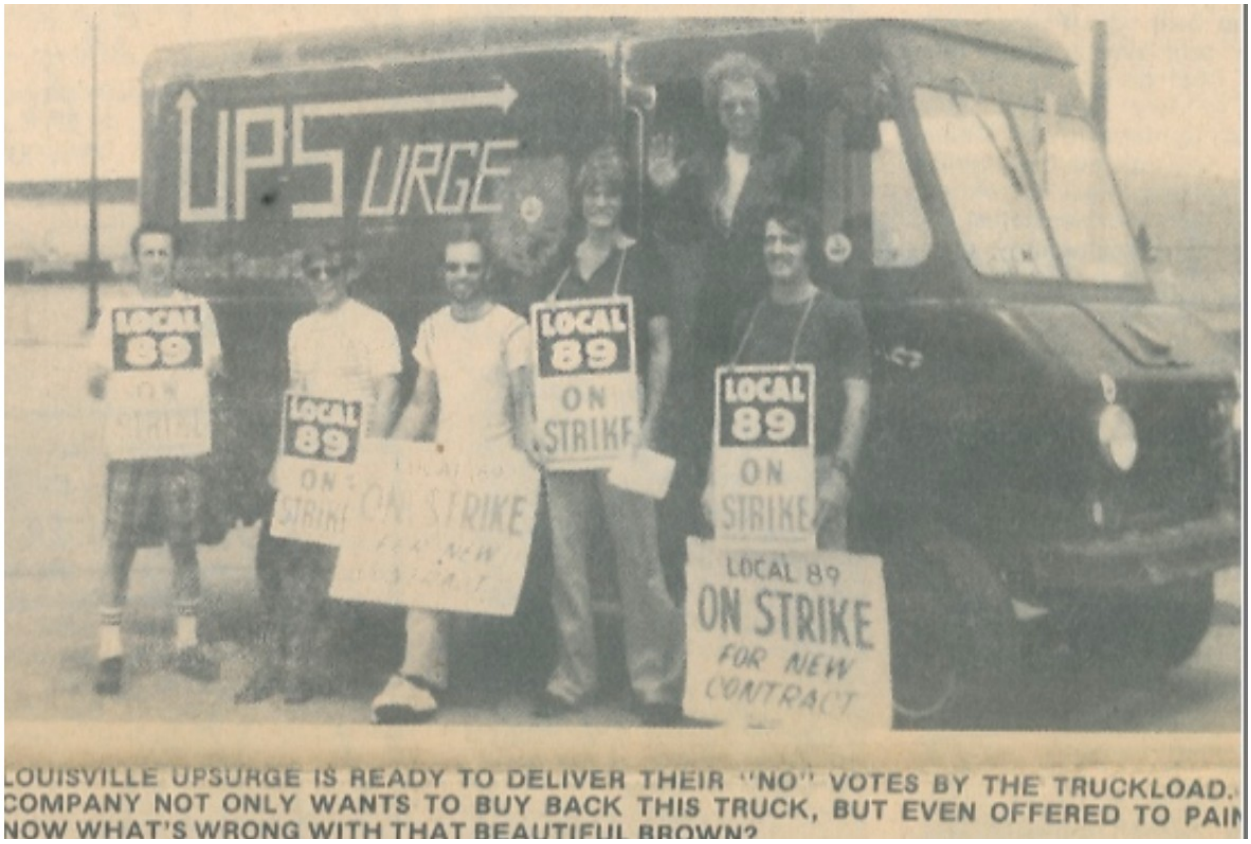

The Rank and File Strategy: A Resource List

by Joe Allen

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"The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself."—Marx & Engels.

"We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act Independently immediately [when] they misrepresent them." — Clyde Workers' Committee (1915).

Introduction

Marxists are guided by one principle in all our work: "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself." The international working class today is the most diverse representation of

humanity in history, and the only class capable of freeing humanity from the catastrophes that modern capitalism has brought to our species and planet. It is this very democratic and liberatory concept—"self-emancipation"—that distinguishes Marxism from other rival 'socialisms' in Marx's time, and has proven a resilient attraction to tens of millions since his death in 1883.

Nowhere does this principle of self-emancipation apply more fully than in the workplace. It may surprise comrades that Marx and Engels were the first socialists to support unions and strikes. Engels wrote:

These strikes, at first skirmishes, sometimes result in weighty struggles; they decide nothing, it is true, but they are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the workingmen in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided. And as schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled.

How Marxists should apply the principle of self-emancipation in the workplace and in the unions that have flowered since Marx and Engels' time, however, has shown itself to be a more complicated and thornier question. The industrial trade unions that flowered in the years following the Second World War became increasingly bureaucratized, highly undemocratic with a leadership remote from the realities of shop floor work life.

One product of this situation was the rank and file rebellion across many industrial countries beginning in the mid-1960s through the late 1970s. This rebellion had a profound effect especially on the U.S. New Left in the years following end of the U.S. war in Vietnam. Thousands of activists left the campuses and went into the factories, mills, auto plants, shipyards, and many other industries to radicalize the already burgeoning rebellion in the U.S. workplace. A similar but distinct movement took place in many other countries in the 1970s. The rank and file rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s was an international phenomenon, not just an American one.

Today, we are inspired by the rediscovery of the strike by the U.S. working class, especially education workers, across the country. However, at the same time, much of the trade union movement seems stuck in the past. For those of us in DSA, we will be debating various strategies to revive the labor movement at our upcoming convention. The Rank and File Strategy (RFS), which I support, is one of many proposals to be debated, but I've found that some of the recent discussions around the RFS have been narrow both in scope and depth.

The RFS has deep roots in the socialist and communist movements, at least going back to the 1920s, if not earlier. For example, term “Militant Minority” has been revived without many people being aware that the term’s roots lie in the syndicalist movement of the early 2oth Century.

For another example, much framework of the RFS strategy pioneered by the International Socialists (IS) in Britain and the U.S. in the 1960s and ’70s was rooted in the newly born Communist movement in the early 1920s. William Z. Foster, who remains the most important Marxist trade unionist in U.S. history, and his Trade Union Education League (TUEL), at least, up until 1927, is still a model to guide us. The Communist International primarily saw the RFS strategy as a method of turning the relatively ‘small’ Communist Parties of Britain and the U.S. into mass parties by turning away from “dual unionism” and radicalizing the existing trade union movement.

Just a note on what I’ve included and not included in the reading list. This is not a general labor history and socialism reading list. Its emphasis is on original readings and political debates and turning points that highlighted or bring forth debates about the RFS. So, for example, I haven’t included my book *The Package King: A Rank and File History of UPS*, or many of the classic histories or the many good books that exist today on a variety of labor related topics that comrades should read. I have included some articles and a few books, however, to provide context when needed.

I’ve included several writings on the British Communist Party in the 1920s, and the British IS in the 1960s and 1970s, who theorized and implemented a RFS on a much grander scale than anything done in the United States, and who had a big impact on the U.S. Left. The Italian revolutionary left was also central to the rebellions in the factories in the 1970s, and I’ve included some writings on it because it had a big impact at the time, though much of this has been unfortunately forgotten, like much of rank and file history.

For the section that covers the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., I’ve leaned heavily in the direction of writings and debates around the rebellion in the auto industry. The reasons for this is that it was the most important single industry in the country at the time with what was considered the strongest and most progressive union, the UAW. The black workers rebellion in auto produced the most important, though short-lived, political formation of the era: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). The nexus of economic and racial exploitation that produced the LRBW remains at the heart of the U.S. capitalist economy today.

I’ve also include in the reading list memoirs and documentaries to bring to life what are sometimes dry debates. For example, *Finally Got The*

News about the LRBW is an amazing film. Lastly, I've tried to carry the discussion from history to the present, including current debates and writing about the RFS, and its relationship to building a new socialist movement in the United States.

This is an extensive catalogue but I believe it will provide DSA members and friends many opportunities to create study groups that dive deep into specific eras of rank and file movements or simply get a general overview. Good reading!

Marx and Engels

Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), available here.

Marx & Engels, *On Trade Unions*, available here.

Hal Draper, *Marxism and Trade Unions* (1970), available here.

Syndicalism and the 'Militant Minority'

The *Agitator* and *Syndicalist* newspaper collection (1910-13), available here.

Ralph Darlington, *Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism*, Haymarket Books, available here.

Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: Industrial Workers of the World,* available here.

William Z. Foster, *Special News from France*, available *here.*

William Z. Foster, *The Socialist and Syndicalist Movements in France*, available here.

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William Z. Foster, *Syndicalism*, available here.

William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin,* available in most city libraries.

William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and its Lessons*, available here.

IWW newspaper collection, available here.

Vincent St. John, *The IWW: Its History, Structure and Methods*, available here.

Lenin, the Bolsheviks, and the Communist International

Tony Cliff, *Lenin Vol. 1: From the Marxist study circle to industrial action* (1975), available here.

V.I. Lenin, *Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?* (1920), available here.

V.I. Lenin, *Factory Courts*, available here.

Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*, available here.

John Riddell, *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International (1921)*, available here.

John Riddell, *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (1922), available here.

Reiner Tosstorff, *The Red International of Labour Unions 1920 – 1937*, available here.

Rosa Luxemburg

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions* (1906), available here.

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Two Methods of Trade Union Policy* (1907), available here.

William Z. Foster, the Communist Party, and Trade Union Education League

James R. Barrett, William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism**,** available here.

James P. Cannon**,** *Our Aims and Tactics in The Trade Unions* (1924), available here.

Philip Foner, The T.U.E.L to the End of the Gompers Era, available here.

William Z. Foster, Strike Strategy (1926), available here.

William Z. Foster, *The Principles and Program of the Trade Union Educational League* (1922), available here.

William Z. Foster, James P. Cannon, and Earl R. Browder, Trade Unions in America (1925), available here.

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William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism: Principles and Organization, Strategy and Tactics*, available here.

The Labor Herald, Newspaper of the TUEL 1922-24, available here.

Solomon Lozovsky, *Lenin and the Trade Union Movement*, (1924), available here.

Britain 1910 and 1920s

Ken Appleby, *The Rank and File Movement: Yesterday and Today* (1975), available here.

Tony Cliff & Donny Gluckstein, Marxism and Trade Union Struggle:: The General Strike of 1926 (1986).

Will Gallacher, *Clyde Workers' Committee: To All Clyde Workers* (1915 leaflet), available here.

Duncan Hallas, The First Shop Stewards' Movement, (1973), available here.

Duncan Hallas, *The Communist Party and the General Strike* (1976), available here.

Jim Higgins, *The Minority Movement* (1970), available here.

Jim Higgins, *Revolutionary Trade Unionism* (1971), available here.

Jim Higgins, *Revolutionary Trade Unionism (Part II): Dual Unionism in Britain* (1971).

James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, available here.

J.T. Murphy, *The Workers' Committee An Outline of its Principles and Structure* (1917), available here.

Minneapolis: Teamsters and Trotskyists

James P. Cannon, *Learn from Minneapolis!* (May 1934), available here.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion, Teamster Power, Teamsters Politics, and Teamster Bureaucracy*, available here.

Bryan D. Palmer, *Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Truckers' Strikes of 1934,* available here.

James Rumford Walker, *American City: A Rank and File History of Minneapolis* (2005), available here.

WWII in the U.S.

Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War At Home: The CIO In World War II*, available here.

Ernest Rice McKinney (David Coolidge) collection on wartime strikes, labor, and Jim Crow, available here.

Radical America magazine, *American Labor in the 1940s*, available here.

Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The struggle against the no-strike pledge in the UAW during WWII,* available here.

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Max Shachtman, *Labor and Strikes in Wartime* (April 1941), available here.

Britain in the 1960s and 1970s

Colin Barker, *I.S. in the 60s: two thousand workers with bricks: the Roberts-Arundel strike*, available here.

Colin Barker, *I.S. in the 60s: May 68 and after*, available here.

Colin Barker, *Comment on Incomes Policy and Class Power* (1966), available here.

Martin Barker, *The Merseyside Building Workers' Movement: A Case History* (1968), available here.

Alex Callinicos, *The Rank and File Movement Today* (1982), available here.

Tony Cliff & Colin Barker, *Incomes policy, legislation and shop stewards* (1966), available here.

Tony Cliff, Factory Branches (1973), available here.

Tony Cliff, The Bureaucracy Today (1971), available here.

Tony Cliff, *The employers' offensive: productivity deals and how to fight them* (1970), available here.

Sheila Cohen, *Notoriously Militant: The Story of a Union Branch (*2013), available here.

Duncan Hallas, *The CP, the SWP, and the Rank and File Movement* (1977), available here.

Duncan Hallas, *Trade Unionists and Revolution—A Response to Richard Hyman* (1980), available here.

Duncan Hallas, *What is 'economism'?* (1973), available here.

Richard Hyman, *British trade unionism: post-war trends and future prospects* (1980), available here.

Jonathan Neale, *Memoirs of a Callous Picket: Working for the National Health Service* (1983), available here.

Brian Pearce, *Some Past Rank and File Movements* (1959), available here.

Italy: Hot Autumn of 1969 and 1970s

Avanguardia Operaia and the International Socialists, *A Debate: Revolutionary Politics Today* (1975), available here.

Mike Balfour, *Italy: The Unions and Rank and File Power* (April 1973), available here.

Radical America, *Italy 1969-70* (Sept.-October 1971), available here.

Radical America magazine, *Working Class Struggles in Italy* (March-April 1973), available here.

U.S.: Rank and File Rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s

Joe Allen, *Roots of A Rank and File Revolt*, available here.

Farrell Dobbs, *Trends in the Trade Unions* (1968), available here.

Joel Geier, *Revolutionaries and the Rank and File Upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s*, available here.

Martin Glaberman, *Militant as hell on the waterfront: The political thought of Stan Weir*, available here.

Martin Glaberman, *Be his payment high or low: The American Working Class in the Sixties* (1965), available here.

International Socialists, *Fighting to Win: Class Struggle Unionism* (1975), available here.

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International Socialists*, Workers' Power* newspaper (1970-1978), available here.

Kim Moody, *The American Working Class in Transition* (1970), available here.

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Kim Moody & Sy Landy, *The Unions Under Monopoly Capitalism: The Ranks Need Independent Struggle Committee*, available here.

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Radical America magazine, *Black Labor* issue (March-April 1971), available here.

Sojourner Truth Organization, *Workplace* Papers (1972-1980), available here.

Stan Weir: *USA: The Labor Revolt or A New Era of Labor Revolt* , available here

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Stan Weir, *Class Forces in the 1970s*, available here.

U.S. Auto Industry

Black Star Productions, *Finally Got the News*, available here.

Mike Siviwe Elliot, *Talking with General Baker: Revolutionary Detroit Auto Worker*, available here.

Dan Georgakas & Marvin Surkin, *Detroit I Do Mind Dying* (2012 edition), available here.

James A Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers,* available here.

Martin Glaberman, *Unions vs. Workers in the Seventies: The Rise of Militancy in the Auto Industry* (1972), available here.

Martin Glaberman, *Black Cats, White Cats, Wildcats: Auto Workers in Detroit* (1969), available here.

Michael Hamlin with Michele Gibbs, *A Black Revolutionary's Life in Labor: Black Workers Power in Detroit*, available here.

William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The 'Civilized' Relationship between General Motors and the United Auto Workers* (1973), available here.

Studs Terkel, Interview with William Serrin discussing the *'The Company and the Union'* (1973), available here.

Jack Weinberg, *Detroit Auto Uprising 1973* (1974), available here

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Workers Power newspaper, *Black Panther Caucus at Fremont GM, Interview with Kenny Horsten*, available here.

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Steel, Teamsters, and Mining

Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, Cal Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s*, available here.

Steve Brill, *The Teamsters* (1978), available here.

Candace Cohn, *Women's Liberation and the Rank and File Rebellion in Steel*, available here.

Ken Crowe, *Collision: How the Rank and File Took Back the Teamster* (1992), available here.

Mary Deaton, *How to Beat the Big Brown Machine*, available here.

Farrell Dobbs, *Hoffa and the Teamsters*, (Summer 1966), available here.

Samuel Friedman, *Teamster Rank and File* (1982), available here.

Joe Klein, *Eddie Sadlowski: Old-Fashioned Hero of the New Working Class, Rolling Stone* (1975), available here.

Barbara Koppel, *Harlan County, USA*, available here.

Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (1991), available here.

October League*, Wildcat at Mead* (1972), available here.

Steel Shavings, *Steel Workers Fight Back*, available here.

Lee Sustar, *Black Power at the point of production, 1968–73*, available here.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union, *Fighting for Rank and File Power* (1977), available here.

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Trade Union Bureaucracy

Robert Brenner, *The Paradox of Social Democracy* (2016), available here.

David Camfield, *What is the Trade Union Bureaucracy? : A Theoretical Account*, available here.

Ralph Darlington, *The Rank and File and the Trade Union Bureaucracy* (2014), available here.

William Z. Foster, *Bankruptcy of the American Labor Movement* (1922), available here.

William Z. Foster, *Misleaders of American Labor* (1927), available here.

Richard Hyman, Birth of the Trade Union Bureaucracy (1976), available here.

Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unions (1973), available here.

Charlie Post, *On the Labor Bureaucracy* (1997), available here.

Warren Van Tine, *Making of the Labor Bureaucrat: Union Leadership in the United States, 1870-1920*, available here.

The New Left, the Working Class, and "Industrialization"

Joe Allen, *Between Workers and Students*, available here.

Jack Barnes, *Leading the Party into Industry* (1978), available here.

Hal Draper, *Rank and File Organization in the Labor Movement* (1970), available here.

Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, available here.

International Socialists (U.S.), Internal bulletin and documents (1969-1986). Among the documents currently available here are:

For a New Industrialization Campaign"(1974).

For a Workers' Combat Organization – The Bolshevization of the IS" (1975).

Mass Work, Politics, Building the Party (1976).

The New Course for the IS by the Left Faction (1976), also available here.

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Why We Leave the International Socialists by the Rank and File Caucus of the IS (1979)

Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in 1960s*, available here.

Kim Moody, Fred Eppsteiner, and Mike Pflug, *Towards the Working Class: An SDS Convention Working Paper* (1966) , available here.

Kieran Walsh Taylor, *Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the U.S. Labor Movement* (1967-1981), a PDF, available here.

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Stan Weir, *Problems Of, Background To, Questions For A Labor Perspective—with Some Beginnings* (1972), available here

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Political Assessments and Personal Reflections

Bill Breihan, *Reflections on the SWP's 1970s Turn to Industry*, available here.

Peter Camejo, *Against sectarianism: The Evolution of the Socialist Workers Party 1978-1983*, available here.

Sheila Cohen, *Ramparts of Resistance: Why Workers Lost Their Power, and How to Get It Back*, available here.

David Finkel, *SWP: Long March to Oblivion*, available here.

Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (1978), available here.

Milton Fisk, *Socialism From Below in the United States: Chapter VII. The mid-Seventies to the founding of the International Socialist Organization* (1977), available here.

John Hendrickson, *Working at Harley-Davidson,* available here.

Alice and Staughton Lynd, *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* (2012 edition), available here.

David Ranney, *Living and Dying on the Factory Floor: From the Outside In and the Inside Out* (2019), available here.

Rank and File Strategy, "Salting", and the "Militant Minority" Today

Democratic Socialists of America, *Why Socialists Become Teachers* (2018), available here.

Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics*, available here.

Barry Eidlin, What is the Rank-and-File Strategy, and Why Does It Matter?, available here.

Max Elbaum, Beyond the Rank-and-File Strategy, available here.

Erik Forman, *Let's Get to Work: "Salting" built the early American labor movement — and it can revive it today*, available here.

Nelson Lichtenstein, *Assessing 40 Years of Labor Notes*, available here.

Kim Moody, *The Rank and File Strategy: Building A Socialist Movement in the U.S. (2000)*, available here.

Kim Moody, *Reflections on the Rank and File Strategy* (2018), available here.

Kim Moody, *Turning to the Working Class (2018),* available here.

Kim Moody, *The Rank and File's Paper of Record*, available here.

Kim Moody, We Just Remembered How to Strike, available here.

Kim Moody, *In Solidarity: Essays on Working-Class Organization in the United States, available here.*

Socialist Worker newspaper, *Socialists at Work*, available here.

Solidarity, *Radicals at Work! An Activist Strategy for Revitalizing the Labor Movement* (2008), available here.

Micah Uetricht, *Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity*, available here.

Micah Uetricht and Barry Eidlin, *U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing "Militant Minority,"* available here.

Rand Wilson and Peter Olney, *Socialists Can Seize the Moment at Amazon*, available here.

Remembrances

Pete Camarata, Teamster Rebel and TDU founder. Celebration of his life, videos available here, here, and here.

David Goldberg, *Detroit's Radical* (General Baker), available here.

Dan La Botz, *Steve Kindred, Irrepressible Radical*, available here.

Ed Sadlowski & Steelworkers Fightback remembered (1938–2018), available here, here, and here.